

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 21, 2006

The Honorable James H. Douglas
Governor
State of Vermont
109 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05609

Dear Governor Douglas:

We are writing in response to your letter to Representatives Pombo and Goodlatte regarding the New England Wilderness Act of 2006. This legislation passed the United States Senate unanimously on Tuesday, September 19, with bipartisan support.

We are quite puzzled by your implication that there has not been sufficient public process for Vermonters' views about the designation of additional wilderness in the Green Mountain National Forest. Since 2001, there have been more than 70 public meetings, five local planning groups, four educational forums and four open houses on the Green Mountain National Forest plan. In addition, throughout the planning process the Delegation staff has met with a diverse group of stakeholders, State officials and Forest Service staff in regular meetings facilitated by the University of Vermont Extension Service. Throughout the planning process the Forest Service received more than 10,000 official public comments on the future management of the Green Mountain National Forest, the vast majority of which supported more wilderness.

In 2003 you asked, and we agreed, to delay moving forward with wilderness legislation prior to the completion of the Green Mountain National Forest plan revision process. At that time you recognized the important role this Forest Plan revision process played, when you wrote to us stating that the "Forest Plan Revision process will ... allow all interested and affected citizens to become informed and offer opinions." In response to your concern, we delayed introduction of any legislation in order to best utilize the tremendous public process undertaken by the Forest Service.


At the conclusion of the Forest Service process, it was clear by the abundant public record in support of additional wilderness that the Delegation should move forward with its Congressional responsibility for wilderness designations. We believe our legislation represents a fair and thoughtful outcome representing the wishes of a strong majority of Vermonters, whose views and wishes were represented and considered during the Forest Planning process you had endorsed.

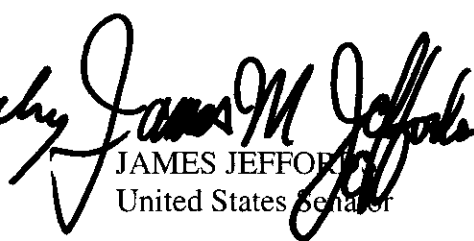
As you know, the list of locales in which the Forest Service has proposed wilderness areas is nearly identical to the settings in which wilderness is proposed by our legislation. We therefore note the inconsistency of your letter's suggestion of local government veto power over Federal land management decisions, especially as surveys indicate a robust majority of Vermonters in communities within the Green Mountain National Forest support additional wilderness.

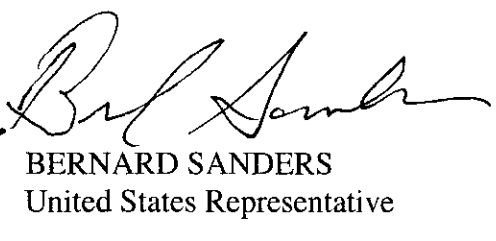
We were disappointed at your recent refusal to entertain our good faith efforts to address some of the concerns you raised in your letter earlier this month. Our offices have spent years attending public meetings and working with a diverse set of stakeholders to formulate our balanced legislation and have always remained open to your input. The public record supports our balanced Federal legislation to carry out our Congressional responsibility to designate national wilderness lands in Vermont.

Finally, we are disappointed that after such an extensive public record in Vermont and after our efforts to communicate directly with you, you now have chosen to call on the Republican House leadership to thwart a Vermont wilderness bill that many Vermonters have worked toward crafting and enacting, over many years. Vermonters of today, and Vermonters of generations to come, deserve our best efforts to carry this legislation forward.

Sincerely,

PATRICK LEAHY
United States Senator

JAMES JEFFORDS
United States Senator

BERNARD SANDERS
United States Representative